



Reclaiming Wyoming: A Comprehensive Plan For Prevention, Early Intervention, and Treatment of Substance Abuse

INTRODUCTION



Figure 2: Wyoming Youth Summit Learning About the Interconnections of Our Lives

Criminologists James Q. Wilson and George Kelling have written extensively about what they call “The Broken Window Theory.” Their theory is that if a window is broken and not soon repaired, people walking by will conclude that no one cares. Quickly they will begin to break other windows in the area, rapidly spreading the damage to other adjacent buildings. They argue that in a city, relatively minor problems like graffiti become invitations for more troublesome activity.

Wyoming’s addiction problem is like that. For years, the treatment system has gone unattended and has been woefully under funded. Wyoming spending for addiction prevention, treatment, and research is about one-half the national average. Like all other states, Wyoming spends a great deal of money on the substance abuse problem but shamefully little goes to efforts that hold the greatest promise for breaking the cycle of substance abuse, i.e. prevention, early intervention, and treatment. For each state dollar spent on programs related to substance abuse, e.g. law enforcement, corrections, special education, health care related to addiction, child welfare, etc, only two cents is spent on treatment. Another penny is spent on prevention.^c

The lack of adequate funding has given birth to inadequate care, poor results, and an image that treatment

doesn’t work. The “broken window” has come in the form of chronically relapsing addicts, longer prison sentences, and high recidivism rates. Left un-repaired, these have resulted in the lack of effective and affordable treatment and worse, denial and apathy in communities even as they began to experience widespread growth in substance abuse measured by a variety of indicators.

In his recent book, The Tipping Point, Malcolm Gladwell, a former business and science writer for *The Washington Post*, offers what has become the metaphor for this plan. Gladwell describes the crisis of the 1970’s in the New York subway system. Over years of neglect, the system had become an unpleasant, even dangerous place frequented by criminals and addicts to such a degree that decent folks stayed a way in such numbers as to create a financial crisis for the New York Transit Authority. In the early 80’s a new director, David Gunn, was hired to revitalize the system.

After some review, he concluded that the first necessary step was to clean up the subway cars. Others had argued for “bolder” action such as placing policemen in every car and massive arrests. Gunn, however, believed the necessary first step was to “repair the broken windows.” For the New York subway system, that meant removing the graffiti from the cars, painting them, reupholstering the seats, and making them pleasant places to be. While many felt there were larger problems that required immediate attention, Gunn

^c *Shoveling Up: The Impact of Substance Abuse on State Budgets*, The National Center on Addiction and Substance Abuse (CASA), January 2001 at pages 25 and 78

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decided that the graffiti was symbolic of the system's greater problems.

Most important to the success of this endeavor was the commitment Gunn and the Transit Authority made "that there should be no retreat, that once a car was 'reclaimed' it should never be allowed to be vandalized again."^d

After having conducted a thorough review of the problem of substance abuse in Wyoming, we have adopted these reclaimed subway cars as a metaphor for this plan. In a less than coordinated, effective manner, Wyoming spends significant amounts of money on substance abuse. Meeting the challenge will require additional funding. It is wasted, however, unless we also make the commitment "that there should be no retreat." Once a school or a community is reclaimed, we must commit ourselves to make personal and financial investments in making certain it will not be lost again. Once the life of an addict is reclaimed, a continuum of services and care must be in place to assure, to the maximum extent possible, that the person is not again lost to chronic addiction.

As you read this report, you will see the futility of prior programs that have in many cases done exceptional work in sobering up severe addicts and getting them in recovery only to see them relapse and return to drugs and alcohol because of the lack of transitional services and after care. This trend is evident not only in treatment but

also in prevention, where arguably, the continuing commitment is even more important. In some measure, we have relied on a brief intervention during 5th and 6th grades to inoculate our children from substance abuse. As one DCI agent told me, "We spend six weeks warning these kids about the dangers of drugs, walk them across the stage and give them a tee shirt. But, we forget that they will soon outgrow that tee shirt!"

As will be made clear in this report, Wyoming cannot withstand the status quo. It leads to an unacceptable future for our youth, their families, and our community life together. A bold commitment must be made now and that commitment revolves around a promise that once reclaimed, we will commit the resources necessary to make sure we will not lose that person, family, school, or community again.

It is important to note that the rapid rate of addiction research in recent years has provided us with a greatly increased "base of knowledge about substance abuse."^e Most state-level policymakers, in Wyoming and the other 49 states, have failed to keep pace with the changing understanding of addiction research in prevention, early intervention, and treatment. Lacking good research and data, Wyoming's addiction prevention and treatment programs have been neither comprehensive nor targeted. They have grown up around existing programs, driven largely by individual interests and

^d Gladwell, Malcolm, The Tipping Point, Little Brown & Company (2001) at page 143

^e *Changing the Conversation*, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, November 2000 at page 73

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without the benefit of good outcome evaluations.

Few state leaders have acted as boldly as Wyoming's Governor and Legislature. This political commitment is the key element to the creation of a common statewide approach to meeting the challenge. It is the glue that will hold together a system as it evolves into one based on common understandings and goals. With a political commitment to rebuild our efforts around good science and to keep it on track by collecting and employing good data, Wyoming will lead the nation in reducing the abuse of drugs and alcohol, leading the way to healthier families and safer communities.

THE HB83 STUDY PROCESS

The Substance Abuse Division concluded from the outset that the process by which the recommendations in this plan were reached was, in many ways, as important as the conclusions themselves. The *process* needed to be as comprehensive as the plan.

The substance abuse problem is much like the story of the proverbial blind men attempting to describe the elephant. There are many people involved at some level in the issue. They include judges, prosecuting and defense attorneys, parents, foster parents, grandparents, families, the addicts - some of whom are in recovery and some of whom are not, the treatment professionals, teachers and school administrators, the law enforcement community, private and public

corrections programs, caseworkers, healthcare personnel, state and local agencies, state and local programs, probation officers, the business community, the faith community, and many others. Each has a perspective. For the most part, however, that perspective is limited by their role in the system.

Each player in this system can tell you what the substance abuse problem looks like from their perch, but no one agency has a broad system-wide, lifespan view of the challenge...until now. As a result of the leadership of the Governor and the Legislature in enacting HB83, Wyoming has achieved what has been accomplished in virtually no other state, i.e. a system-wide, lifespan analysis of substance abuse.

The process by which this has been accomplished has included hundreds of hours of meetings and interviews with people who are laboring in the vineyard. Since HB83 was enacted, the writers of this plan have met with all of the state agencies involved in the issue. We have conferred with the Department of Health, the Department of Corrections, the Department of Family Services, the staff and some of the youth at the Wyoming Boys and Girls Schools, the Department of Education, the Department of Employment, the Board of Judicial Policy and Administration, the Department of Revenue and the Office of the Public Defender, among others.

Additionally, we have met with and interviewed a wide variety of community and professional

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organizations. They include the Wyoming Association of Mental Health and Substance Abuse Centers with whom we have met frequently, the Wyoming Association of Municipalities, the Wyoming School Boards' Association, the Wyoming Association of School Administrators, the Wyoming Education Association, the Wyoming Prosecuting Attorneys' Association, the Wyoming Association of Broadcasters, and the Wyoming Business Alliance. We have met with many community groups including Project SAFE in Casper, Cheyenne CAARES, the Link, Project Paycheck, and the Casey Family Program.

In the course of the study, all public, substance abuse providers have participated in a services and staffing survey. Professional licensing boards have been surveyed to learn of their policies toward impaired professionals and schools have been surveyed to determine local policies on substance abuse and tobacco use.

The Division has contracted with Dr. Dennis Embry, president of the PAXIS Institute, and Rodger McDaniel to conduct the study and write the report. Dr. Embry has subcontracted with a number of the brightest experts in America to provide their expertise on selected aspects of the plan. These experts include the Center on Addiction and Substance Abuse (CASA) at Columbia University in New York; Dr. Anthony Biglan of the Oregon Research Institute; Dr. Alan Marlatt, a renowned international expert on addiction relapse prevention; Jerry Wells of the Koch

Crime Institute; Dr. Jim Derzon of the Pacific Research Institute, an expert on social marketing for prevention; Dr. Gail Harris of the University of Arizona, an expert on issues of substance abuse in pregnant women and the impact on infants and young children; Conrad Hogan, former Commissioner for Correction in Vermont; and DataCorp of Rhode Island; among others. Copies of their *curriculum vitae* are attached as appendices to this report.

Wyoming experts have also contributed heavily to this effort. Along with the experts working in the agencies listed above, contributors include Dr. Narina Nunez of the Statistical Analysis Center at the University of Wyoming, and UW professor Dr. Michael Loos. Literally hundred of pages of data have been collected and reviewed. The authors have conducted site visits of several community programs including the detox units at Cheyenne and Riverton, the therapeutic communities at Rock Springs and Sheridan, and the men's and women's prisons including time spent talking with prisoners receiving treatment in the intensive treatment units.

After hundreds of hours of gathering information from these and other sources, we took our formulating ideas to the "real experts", i.e. the folks working on the frontlines. The Substance Abuse Division invited more than 1600 Wyoming people to attend meetings on selected, substance abuse topics between June 11 and June 20, 2001. Invited were all Wyoming judges, licensed therapists, county commissioners, city council

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members, mayors, school board members, state legislators, mental health and substance abuse professionals, state agency officials and staff, members of the juvenile and adult recovering community, members of the faith community, staff of treatment programs at the state and local level, and others.

These “nuts and bolts” sessions included a day and a half devoted to corrections and criminal justice programs, another day and a half devoted to juvenile issues, and specific discussions of topics such as elderly addiction, women’s treatment issues, school prevention efforts, and detox programs. Nearly 300 Wyoming citizen-experts took part in these brainstorming sessions. Participants were encouraged to candidly assess what we are doing right and what we are not doing so well, identifying gaps and gaffes in services, to think outside the box, and to be bold in using their vast experience to help us find bold, innovative ideas. These meetings were pivotal to our efforts and produced significant information that the participants will find at the heart of our recommendations.

The Division has sponsored two public meetings, one in Casper and the other in Buffalo. Additional community meetings will be scheduled once the report is made public so that other community input may be obtained. In addition to the public meetings, there are plans to survey judges, prosecutors, county sheriffs, and municipal police chiefs about the study recommendations. We have made a continuing effort to provide information to all members of

the Legislature, recognizing there is much to share and that the budget session alone will not afford sufficient time to digest the finding. The authors of the study have continuously encouraged legislators to share their thoughts, concerns, and questions so that, in the end, we can be satisfied that the final product is responsive to them.

In a word, the Substance Abuse Division took the Legislature seriously when we read HB83 as calling for a “*comprehensive substance abuse control plan for prevention, early intervention and treatment...*” W.S. 9-2-122(a). We look forward to continuing this important dialogue with the Governor, members of the Legislature, other elected officials, community leaders, parents, and addicts.

After all of this work, it is important to say that our most significant finding is the existence of *hope*. As you read the grim statistics and stories that paint the picture of Wyoming’s substance abuse problem, please know that while it is clear we have an undeniable problem, there is every reason to be hopeful. Wyoming can win. While the statistics show we now lead the state in several troubling categories, we have attempted to provide a blueprint for changing that so that Wyoming leads the nation in providing safe communities where families thrive and our people achieve.

Together, we can reclaim Wyoming.

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